Chapter 12

Structural and Technology–Mediated Violence:
Profiling and the Urgent Need of New Tutelary Technoknowledge

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ABSTRACT

A kind of common prejudice is the one that tends to assign the attribute “violent” only to physical and possibly bloody acts – homicides, for example – or physical injuries; but linguistic, structural, and other various aspects of violence – also embedded in artifacts – have to be taken into account. The paper will deal with the so-called “technology-mediated violence” taking advantage of the illustration of the case of profiling. If production of knowledge is important and central, this is not always welcome and so people have to acknowledge that the motto introduced in the book Morality in a Technological World (Magnani, 2007) knowledge as a duty has various limitations. Indeed, a warning has to be formulated regarding the problem of identity and cyberprivacy. The author contends that when too much knowledge about people is incorporated in external artificial things, human beings’ “visibility” can become excessive and dangerous. Two aims are in front of people to counteract this kind of technological violence, which also jeopardizes Rechtsstaat and constitutional democracies: preserving people against the various forms of circulation of knowledge about them and building new suitable “technoknowledge” (also to originate new “embodied” legal institutions) to reach this protective result.
1. INDIVIDUAL AND STRUCTURAL/TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED VIOLENCE

In my recent book *Understanding Violence. The Intertwining of Morality, Religion, and Violence: A Philosophical Stance* (Magnani, 2011) I have stressed the attention to a kind of common prejudice which is the one that tends to assign the attribute “violent” only to physical and possibly bloody acts – homicides, for example – or physical injuries; but linguistic, structural, and other various aspects of violence – also embedded in artifacts – have to be taken into account. However, even homicide itself is more complicated than expected, in fact recent research on the legal framework of homicide and on its biological roots shows many puzzling aspects. Brookman (2005) contends that it is not appropriate to think of homicide just as a kind of criminal or violent behavior, because the phenomenon is complex and socially constructed for the most part. Those who kill do so for very different reasons and under different circumstances, and some structurally originated killing is often hidden and disregarded, even from the legal point of view, such as in the case of multiple homicides perpetrated by artificial technostructures such as corporations. He illustrates various explanations of homicide: psychoanalytic and clinical approaches, accounts from evolutionary psychology or social and cognitive psychology frameworks, sociological and legal aspects and the biological roots of killing.

The extension of the meaning of the word violence brings up the need to reconsider our concepts of safety, ethics, morality, technology, law, and justice. May be the philosophy-violence connection (with the help of other related disciplines, both scientific and cognitive) will generate novel ideas and suggestions. Of course people and intellectuals are clearly aware that drug, alcohol, revenge, frustration, and mobbing behaviors are related to violent events, and so many aspects of linguistic and structural violence are acknowledged, but this acknowledgment is almost always fugitive and superficial. In sum, we see the spectacle of violence everywhere, but, so to say, the violence always out there, involves other human beings and we can stay distant from the theme of violence by adopting a simple and familiar – but practically empty – view of it. Indeed, it is implicit that, if we know for certain that we are the possible target of violent behavior, we *a priori* think of ourselves, spontaneously, as exempt from any contamination, in our supposed purity and immunity. We just hope not to become victims, but this is usually considered just a question of good luck, and, above all, we are not interested (even if we are, or think of ourselves as, philosophers) in analyzing the possible existence and character of our own (more or less) violent behavior. It is better not “to problematise our confidence in, or familiarity with, ‘what violence is’ ” (Catley, 2003).

Familiarity with violence involves a trivial and simple sense of violence as interpersonal, physical, and illegitimate, which can be clearly seen in the case of workplace violence as a:

[… ] Deviant set of behaviours to be eradicated through a series of familiar strategic interventions. Workplace violence becomes reduced to a technically rational set of “procedural issues about workforce selection, early detection of potential troublemakers, adequacy of liability insurance, risk management and effective exclusion of potential as well as actual offenders” [… ]. And it is this familiarity that erases questions about the constitution of violence that might lead us to ask other critical questions about the organisation of work and the work organisation beyond individual pathography. Arguably, the familiarity of violence as interpersonal and illegitimate has encouraged explanations of workplace violence to focus on the individual and the eradication of such deplorable behaviour. In these explanations, the focal point has tended around the exposition of the personality and motivations of the “perpetrator”, typically with a view to profiling the violent individual (Catley, 2003).